

I love the movie Invictus. I love the poem too.

“Out of the night that covers me,

Black as the Pit from pole to pole.

I thank whatever gods may be

For my unconquerable soul.”

This is its first stanza. The first time I read it, I did not know what it meant, but I loved it. It gave me warmth and hope.

Invictus means “being victorious”, and I believe everyone can be.

Back in Malaysia, I was a swimmer, a great one too. However, I could not reach my prime goal of becoming the best in my age group. Sometimes people would say: competitions are not all about winning. If it isn't, why bother train? Why even bother continuing these torturous moments of sweat and tears in life? Competing with no heart to win defeats the main purpose of a competition. Then why bother having competitions? It is just like: practice makes perfect when nothing is perfect. Almost every day I would train for at least two and a half hours, every minute with heart. I just wanted to win but I couldn't.

One day during land training, it rained. We moved indoors and continued our training program. It was intensive, as usual, but it was more fun as we had a little running-relay competition. Everyone ran with smiles on their sweaty faces. I was no exception, until I slipped and hit the hand-rail at the end of my run. My right foot's toe received the greatest impact. It started to bleed. I limped down the stairs silently towards the tap near the swimming pool. It was drizzling, and the floor was wet. Blood from my toe diffused into the water, slowly injecting pain into my veins. By the time help came, my right foot was numb. Later on, I learnt that there's a fracture the length of a paperclip with the width of a hair's at the tip of the bone of that toe. My toe nail felt detached from my flesh. Days were long, nights were sleepless... Curse the toe! Curse the rainwater! Curse swimming! I was on the verge of giving up...

It took me three months to recover: one year of hardcore training gone down the drain. I felt pathetic: an inch closer to the edge of giving up.

On my first day of training after recovery, I was as retarded as a slug in the water. My coach, for the first time, gave me the 'look of disappointment'. Humiliation snapped into me. That day onwards, I trained even harder with heart, lungs, kidneys, brain, legs, hands, whatever else, just to make up to that 'look' of his.

Four months later, one of the biggest national swimming competitions came. To my surprise, I received the best female swimmer award for my age group (11 to 12 year olds) with 3 gold medals, 2 silvers, 1 bronze. That instance, I was soaring towards the heavens while munching Oreos in my mouth. I was happy.

I believe everyone can be victorious. Giving up like I almost did will only lead to failure; comfort zones are dangerous as they make us weak. Also, people who do not persevere until the end will never reach the 100th box in a snakes-and-ladders game. The toe incident gave me a great fall that, luckily, I got back on my feet and headed for another route to success. Thus, I believe that as long as we are willing to persevere, no matter the obstacle, we will eventually be led to invictus someday.